

Dear Fellow South African,

Last week, I met with the leadership of the Black Business Council where, among other things, we discussed issues of transformation. I took the opportunity to inform them about government's commitment to transformation and non-racialism. Of all the achievements since the advent of democracy in 1994, perhaps our most important is our sustained and unwavering commitment to transformation and non-racialism.

When we embarked upon this journey, we aimed, in the words of our Constitution, 'to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights'.

We knew that we had to build a truly united nation, not merely to replace domination by one with domination by another.

Non-racialism is not the product of a negotiated compromise, but is a fundamental pillar of the new society we are building. It is only through advancing non-racialism that we will be able to reconstruct the fabric of our society and narrow social and economic divisions and build a new democratic society from the ashes of the old that had destroyed the potential of our country. It is a principle we will not abandon.

We know too well what happened when race was used to exclude the majority of South Africans, and we must actively guard against the return of attitudes that presume the colour of one's skin should confer either privilege or disadvantage.

This is not to say that race can and should be ignored. Our Constitution affirms that we are a nation of diverse cultures, faiths and languages – and protects the right to self-expression and self-identification.

At the same time we also recognise the 'unfinished business' of nation-building: which is overcoming the deep divisions that apartheid created in our society.

That is why redress continues to be a crucial pillar of government policy, whether it is in land reform, employment equity or in economic transformation.

Although we have come a long way since 1994, the occasional expressions of racial and ethnic chauvinism shows that many in our society have yet to overcome what Joe Slovo once termed the 'psychological barrier' towards true non-racialism.

Whether it is reflected in the internal dynamics of political parties, in the workplace, or outwardly expressed on the letter pages of newspapers, one finds a reluctance on the part of some to accept that Africans, whites, Indians and coloureds all have an equal right to a seat at the table of our society.

As a country, we should not allow ourselves to be led down this dark path. We have witnessed elsewhere in the world the consequences of narrow forms of nationalism based on race or ethnicity. It is not the society we want for ourselves or our children.

Since 1994, we have actively sought to drive transformation through affirmative action and our broad-based black economic empowerment policies, through preferential procurement and initiatives like the Black Industrialists programme.

Within government itself, transformation of the public service to reflect this country's demography has been critical. As we strive to rebuild the public service – including at our state-owned entities – it is our mission to appoint people who are capable, qualified, ethical and who embody the values of public service, whether they are black or white, men or women.

The significant progress that has been made in the public sector has not been matched by the private sector.

